Finding historical information about a Virginia company can often be a time-consuming and difficult task. Many companies, particularly small ones, either leave few records, or are reluctant to make those records available to the public. If a company does present its own history, the results are often merely an exercise in public relations. Over time, businesses might change names, move from their original locations, merge with larger entities, or entirely close operations. Because of these barriers, the published and archival materials of the Library of Virginia offer valuable resources for exploring the background of numerous Virginia companies. The following guide is meant to aid the researcher in this endeavor.

DIRECTORIES

If little is known about a company, a directory may be the first and, at times, the only resource. By their nature, these publications generally show nothing more than the name and address of a particular company. However, directories can list the names of major officers, when the company was incorporated, when it began business, and if it is a subsidiary or division of a larger entity. The Library of Virginia houses a considerable number of these resources, some of which began publication more than 100 years ago.

VIRGINIA DIRECTORIES

GENERAL BUSINESS


Also includes Alexandria, Berkley, Fredericksburg, Hampton, Manchester, Newport News, Petersburg and Portsmouth, Virginia, and Frederick, Hagerstown, Hyattsville, and Rockville, Maryland.

**Business Directory of the Principal Cities and Villages of Virginia for 1873–4.** Richmond, Va.: B. Bates; Petersburg, Va.: J. B. Ege, 1874. F224.7 B92

**Elliott and Nye's Virginia Directory and Business Register for 1852.** Richmond, Va.: Elliott and Nye, 1852. F224.7 V83 1852


Previous titles:


*Chataigne’s Virginia Business Directory and Gazetteer.* Richmond, Va.: Baughman Brothers, 1880/81.


**Virginia State Business Directory, 1871–72.** Richmond, Va.: B. Bates, Bookseller and Publisher, 1871. F224.7 V83 1871/72
Virginia Company History Sources

MANUFACTURERS


BANKING AND INSURANCE COMPANIES


In addition to fire, life, and casualty insurance companies, this publication includes fraternal orders.

AFRICAN AMERICAN COMPANIES

Directory of Negro Businesses in Virginia. Hampton, Va.: Extension Department, Hampton Institute, 1940. HF5065 N8 H2

Minority Vendors Listing. Richmond, Va.: Virginia Department of Minority Business Enterprise. 1995–. Quarterly. HD2346 U52 V8
Previous titles:

CITY DIRECTORIES

A valuable source of information for Virginia company history is the city directory. By examining these directories, one can often determine where a particular business was located, names of individuals associated with that business, and the various company name changes that occurred over time. These directories are listed in the Library of Virginia guide “Virginia City Directories Held at the Library of Virginia,” or in the Library catalog under the subheading “directories” that follows the appropriate city name, as in the following examples:

Richmond (Va.)—Directories
Lynchburg (Va.)—Directories
Norfolk (Va.)—Directories
NATIONAL DIRECTORIES

GENERAL BUSINESS

This directory briefly profiles publicly traded companies and banks whose original identities have disappeared because of a name change, merger, acquisition, dissolution, reorganization, bankruptcy, or charter cancellation.


Standard & Poor’s Register of Corporations, Directors and Executives. New York: Standard & Poor’s, 1973–. Annual. HG4057 A4


Previous titles:

INSURANCE COMPANIES


Best’s Insurance Reports (Casualty and Surety) upon American and Foreign Stock Companies, American Mutual Companies, Reciprocal Organizations, Lloyds, State Funds, Assessment Associations and Hospital Service Associations; Transacting All Classes of Business except Life, Fire and Allied Lines, and Marine Insurance, in the United States of America. New York: Alfred M. Best. 1914–1942/43. Annual. HG9956 B5

Previous titles:


Also titled The Insurance Year Book, this publication contains financial information on life, fire and marine, and casualty and surety insurance companies. Included is the year of incorporation, when a company commenced business, and the names of major corporate officers. This year book also details each state’s statutory requirements for insurance companies, and lists the names of insurance agents throughout a state.

The following publications go beyond the scope of directories in their detail, and include concise historical backgrounds of major corporations:


Moody’s (Mergent) Manuals. See the Library Reference Services Department handout “Moody’s (Mergent) Manuals at the Library of Virginia” for a description and chronology of these useful resources.

Directory of Corporate Archives in the United States and Canada
http://www.hunterinformation.com/corporat.htm
The Society of American Archivists, Business Archives Section, maintains this directory on the Internet of the archival holdings of more than 200 companies arranged alphabetically by company name, and indexed geographically. It includes a description of the archival material and names of archivists.
Virginia Company History Sources

COMPANY HISTORIES

The Library of Virginia catalog lists published material about companies under the name of the company as the subject or under broader subject headings. The following are samples:

Company Names
Atlantic and Danville Railway Company
Chesapeake Corporation of Virginia
Ethyl Corporation
Norfolk and Washington Steamboat Company
Philip Morris Incorporated
Shenandoah Iron, Lumber, Mining and Manufacturing Company of Virginia
Tredegar Iron Works (Richmond, Va.)
Virginia Central Railroad Company

Selected Virginia Company Histories


COUNTY AND CITY HISTORIES

Although most of the Virginia county and city histories available at the Library of Virginia tend to focus on general history and genealogy, some have historical information about a few businesses. The following are particularly informative:


King, Helen H. *Historical Notes on Isle of Wight County*. Isle of Wight, Va.: Isle of Wight County Board of Supervisors, 1993. F232 I82 K57 1993


**BIBLIOGRAPHIES**


This bibliographic guide to major library holdings of historical material includes documents about business and industry in Virginia. Arranged under eleven major classifications, there is an economic section that can lead to resources about Virginia companies. A detailed subject index also references the names of individual companies.


Part of the Harvard Studies in Business History series, this well indexed source contains summaries of publications about early Virginia businesses. Material about Virginia companies can be found in the index under the individual company name or by searching for items listed under “Virginia.”


References to certain Virginia company histories can be found in the subject index of this bibliography.

**BIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES**

Biographies about owners or key executives of companies can often lead to additional information. The following publications are excellent resources about Virginians:

Virginia Company History Sources

This unique ongoing project is a major multi-volume reference source of material gathered from original documents with biographical details about Virginians in many walks of life.

Originally published in 1915, this five-volume set of biographies of prominent Virginia citizens includes a number of leading businessmen.

This series, published in five volumes between 1906 and 1909, was designed to describe the lives of “…the men who now represent the intelligence and energy of Virginia,” and includes prominent businessmen.

INDEXES

The Freeman File Microform: An Index to Articles from the Richmond Times-Dispatch and the Richmond News Leader. Special Collections and Archives Department, University Library Services, Virginia Commonwealth University. Fiche 91
This is an index to the Richmond Times-Dispatch and the Richmond News Leader that covers material from the late 1920s to October, 1985, and references articles under company names and names of key individuals.

Magazine Index: Selected Articles on Virginia, c. 1900–1985.
The Library of Virginia Reference Department staff developed this card index in the early 1900s and maintained it until 1985. It covers the following magazines that, among other subjects, include articles about Virginia businesses: Country Life, Iron Worker, Richmond Magazine, Richmond Critic, Southern Living, Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine, Virginia Cavalcade, Virginia Genealogist, The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, and The William and Mary Quarterly.

References to articles about Virginia companies can be found on cards in this index to the Richmond Times-Dispatch and Richmond News Leader under the name of a business and under such broader subject headings as Richmond, Va.–Industries and Richmond, Va.–Banks.

Virginia Cavalcade
The Library of Virginia maintains an Internet site that allows title searching by keyword in all of the volumes of the Virginia Cavalcade, an illustrated magazine of Virginia history and culture, from 1951 to 2002.

As a business resource, this index is particularly strong for references to insurance companies and railroads.

This annual publication, updated monthly, references hundreds of national business magazines, and is indexed by topic and company name.

Earlier editions of this index can be a resource to some national publications with articles about companies.

The Wall Street Journal. New York: Dow Jones, July 8, 1889–. Film 221, or HG1 W258
Daily, except Saturday and Sunday.
This preeminent business newspaper includes national, business, and financial news, and has been indexed monthly, quarterly, and annually since 1955.
DATABASES

America: History and Life
This database abstracts more than 2,000 historical journals, and includes coverage beginning in 1963 for Virginia Cavalcade, 1955 for The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, and 1954 for The William and Mary Quarterly.

Business and Company Resource Center
Part of the Gale database group, the Business and Company Resource Center includes brief company histories and chronologies of major national and international companies, and is a resource for larger Virginia corporations.

Biography and Genealogy Master Index
This Gale database indexes publications with information about prominent living and deceased individuals.

Expanded Academic ASAP
This product, another one of the Gale database group, contains abstracts and the full text of selected scholarly journals. Included are abstracts as early as 1989 from The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography and The William and Mary Quarterly. The full text of the journal Business History Review begins in 1993, with abstracts of articles going back to 1989.

JSTOR
A collection of the entire text of more than 200 scholarly journals, JSTOR includes articles from The William and Mary Quarterly beginning in 1892.

NewsBank Full-Text Newspapers
Available on this database are the complete articles from the Richmond Times-Dispatch (1986 to present), Newport News Daily Press (1989 to present), Roanoke Times (1990 to present), Norfolk Virginian-Pilot (1990 to present), and the Washington Post (1977 to present).

KEY PERIODICALS

Virginia Business. Richmond, Va.: Media General Business Communications, 1986–. HF5065 V8 V81


The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography. Richmond, Va.: Virginia Historical Society, 1893–. F221 V9

The William and Mary College Quarterly. Williamsburg, Va.: Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1944–. F221 W71

Business History Review. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration, 1954–. HF5001 B8262

SELECTED ARTICLES


**ARCHIVAL & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS**


This publication describes the records about Virginia businesses that are available in the Manuscript Room at the Library of Virginia. The collection includes business correspondence, accounts, journals, ledgers, and legal transactions.


The Virginia State Corporation Commission, Office of the Clerk maintains charter books that list requests to incorporate in the state of Virginia, and include any mention of mergers or amendments of existing corporations. An index to the charter books from 1870 to 1981 is available on microfilm. Cabinet 42

*Richmond City Circuit Court Business Records, Corporations, Partnerships, 1870–88*

Housed in the State Records Center on Charles City Road, this document lists more than 300 companies chartered between 1870 and 1888. Indexed by company name, it shows the date that the Circuit Court granted a charter to a company in the city of Richmond. These records may also provide the names of directors and principle officers, why a company was formed and its function, and if any capital stock was issued and the value per share.

*Sanborn Insurance Maps*

The Sanborn Map Company produced large-scale fire insurance maps showing detailed information about building use, and often providing precise features of large factories or commercial establishments. The Library of Virginia’s collection covers Virginia cities and towns from the late 19th century to 1989. It is also offered on a digital database for the years 1867 to 1970. This database contains maps for the District of Columbia and selected cities and towns in Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina.

*Mutual Assurance Society*

http://departments.mwc.edu/hipr/www/masfp3.htm

The Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia, incorporated by the Virginia General Assembly in 1794, sold fire insurance policies for buildings in Virginia. The Library of Virginia maintains a finding aid to policies issued between 1796 and 1867 in Richmond and Henrico County, and the Center for Historic Preservation at Mary Washington College offers a computerized index to the entire collection. As a resource in gathering historical information about Virginia businesses, the Mutual Assurance Society policies cover many commercial enterprises, and name the insured and the occupant of the property, along with its location and value.

*Virginia Historical Inventory*

http://lva1.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/F/?func=file&file_name=find-b-clas15&local_base=CLAS15

The Virginia Writers’ Project, part of the Works Progress Administration, assembled this vast collection of material that includes reports and photographs, available online, of a number of 18th and 19th century Virginia businesses.

*Picture Collection*

The Library of Virginia’s Picture Collection, part of Special Collections, includes a number of Virginia businesses in its variety of illustrated material. This material can be viewed by contacting Special Collections at 804-692-3703.

David Feinberg
April 2003